

COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

Chirikof Island Grazing Program Alaska Peninsula Unit, Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge

Station Name: Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge

Date Established: 1980

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1980 by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (Alaska Lands Act). This act added 1.9 million acres of additional lands to 11 existing refuges, combining a majority of Alaska's seabird habitat into one refuge. Each of the 11 refuges included in the Refuge had their own establishing authority and purposes. Section 305 of the Alaska Lands Act states in part that:

All proclamations, Executive orders, public lands orders, and other administrative actions in effect on the day before the date of the enactment of this Act with respect to units of the National Wildlife System in the State shall remain in force and effect except to the extent that they are inconsistent with this Act and, in any such case, the provisions of such Acts shall prevail.

Purpose (s) for which established:

Section 303 (1)(b) of the Alaska Lands Act sets forth the following major purposes for which Alaska Maritime Refuge was established and shall be managed:

- (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to marine mammals, marine birds and other migratory birds, the marine resources upon which they rely, bears, caribou and other mammals;
- (ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;
- (iii) to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents;
- (iv) to provide, in a manner consistent with subparagraphs (i) and (ii), a program of national and international scientific research on marine resources; and

(v) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge.

Management Goals:

Goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System are:

1. To provide productive and enduring food, water, and shelter to fish, wildlife, and plant communities and to ensure in perpetuity managed and naturally diverse populations of fish, wildlife and plants and the ecological processes that sustain them;
2. To preserve, restore, and enhance species of fish, wildlife and plants that are listed as threatened or endangered or are candidates for listing under section 4 of the Endangered Species Act;
3. To perpetuate migratory bird populations, marine mammals, and anadromous or inter-jurisdictional fish resources;
4. To fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats; and
5. To provide, consistent with the purposes for which an individual affected refuge was established, compatible wildlife-oriented environmental education.

Applicable Laws, Regulations and Policies:

National Wildlife Refuge Administrative Act of 1966 as amended (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee), Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (Alaska Lands Act), National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Wilderness Act of 1964, and International Treaties (see Appendix A for more detailed information on these treaties).

Description of Proposed Use:

The continuation of cattle grazing on Chirikof Island. Chirikof Island became part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge in 1980 with the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. The Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) was obligated to honor an existing Bureau of Land Management (BLM) grazing lease when administrative responsibility transferred from the BLM to the Service. That lease will expire December 31, 2000.

Impacts on Service Lands, Waters or Interest:

Cattle movement on the island has been unrestricted with no apparent grazing management over the years. This uncontrolled, year-long grazing has caused considerable damage to the sand dune habitats along the coast. The active erosion exhibited in these areas is a result of overgrazing which has removed the vegetative cover. On the north end of the island, an area of at least 500 acres has been completely denuded except for a few clumps of beach rye grass (*Elymus mollis*) due to overgrazing. Given the paucity of vegetation and selective grazing habits of cattle for coastal areas, it is unlikely that plant cover could be re-established on the dunes under any grazing regime.

Compared to similar areas, Chirikov Island shows an increase in less desirable range plant species such as Arctic rush (*Juncus arcticus*) and Boreal yarrow (*Achillea borealis*) and a decrease in more palatable species like bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*). These changes can be attributed directly to overgrazing.

Livestock overgrazing, foxes, and ground squirrels have virtually eliminated nesting birds on Chirikov Island with the possible exception of a few scattered song birds and a small number of waterfowl.

Determination:

This use is not compatible with the purposes of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge.

Action to be taken:

The Service will not re-new or extend the grazing lease on Chirikov Island.

Justification:

Once the cattle are removed from the island, the Service plans to remove the foxes and possibly the ground squirrels, both of which were introduced to the island, to restore the natural bio-diversity of the island. Over time, the vegetative community will recover, erosion will cease, and native birds will return to the island, but this recovery will not begin until these introduced species are removed.


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11/15/99
Date